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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: ELECTION CAMPAIGN ROUND-UP NUMBER 5

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Summary and Analysis

1.(SBU) In this fifth round-up of election-related developments:

-- Election postponed in aftermath of Hurricane Dean;

-- Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) delays setting a new date;

-- Unpopular State of Emergency likely to be lifted when electrical power restored to most of island;

-- Opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) draws even with ruling People's National Party (PNP) in popular support;

-- Well-oiled, efficient JLP campaign;

-- Fighting in Mandeville and Montego Bay, allegations of gunmen infiltrating NE St. Catherine;

-- Legal action seeking disqualification of alleged U.S. citizen candidates or Members of Parliament?

2.(SBU) PSM's hesitation to set a new date for the election may well reflect her sense that the PNP is in trouble, and, in such a tight race, could lose its majority in Parliament. On the eve of elections, as Jamaica cleans up after Hurricane Dean, the charismatic PSM must hope to turn a successful disaster recovery to her political advantage in the home stretch.

3.(SBU) For at least a few more days, PSM is likely to project an image of focusing exclusively on the recovery effort, leaving political considerations, and the date for elections, on the back burner. This strategy is risky: a poorly coordinated recovery effort might erode support for her Government. In coming days, much is at stake in Jamaica.
End Summary and Analysis.

Election postponed in aftermath of Hurricane Dean;
New date not yet set

4.(SBU) Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) has:

(A) announced a USD 8.4 million relief program in the aftermath of Hurricane Dean, to include loans to households for emergency repairs, as well as a three-month moratorium on mortgage payments to the National Housing Trust and USD 3.3 million in assistance to the

hard-hit agricultural sector;

(B) postponed national elections, which had been scheduled for Aug. 27;

(C) deferred a decision on setting a new date for elections.

5.(SBU) The PM announced the relief plan in a broadcast to the nation the night of August 22, in which she declared: "No one should take advantage of a crisis of this magnitude to score political points". She made no mention of the Electoral Commission of Jamaica (ECJ)'s recommendation that elections be held on September 3, or of an earlier announcement from the Ministry of Education that the start of the school year would be delayed a week to enable the use of schools as polling stations on September 3.

6.(SBU) PSM initially took the position that the official decisions to postpone elections and to set a new date would be taken by "the Governor General in Council." Subsequently, the Solicitor General agreed to a re-interpretation of "in Council" to mean the Cabinet, thus necessitating an emergency Cabinet meeting the night of August 21. Most observers had expected PSM to announce the new date for elections during her nationwide broadcast the next night. Reliable sources have indicated to post that the Cabinet members all favored September 3, but that PSM refused their advice. ((Note: reftel(B) provides post's preliminary assessment of the political ramifications of Hurricane Dean. End Note.))

State of Emergency Brings Back Painful Memories

7.(SBU) PSM declared a formal nationwide State of Emergency the evening of August 19, citing reports of gunfire, isolated looting, and "sizeable groupings of armed criminals sighted in sections of the Corporate Area" during, and in the immediate aftermath of,

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Hurricane Dean. The PM took this step over the objections of Opposition Leader Bruce Golding, with whom she had spoken twice by telephone.

8.(SBU) PSM's declaration strikes a raw nerve among many Jamaicans, who bitterly recall former PM Michael Manley's misuse of such a State of Emergency to detain political opponents in the run-up to an election during the 1970s. In a statement issued August 21, PSM sought to reassure the people "that this State of Emergency is not an action intended to violate or take away the rights of anyone." However, Golding maintains that a curfew and deployment of the military to reinforce the police--neither of which requires a formal declaration of emergency--easily would have sufficed to deal with the current security situation.

9.(SBU) Both major newspapers have run front-page editorials critical of the State of Emergency, which also has been condemned by the human rights organizations "Independent Jamaica Council for Human Rights" and "Families Against State Terrorism". PSM has responded to her critics by stating that "I have no hesitation in accepting full and personal responsibility for that recommendation".

In her broadcast of August 22, PSM defended the continuation of the State of Emergency, pointing out that only 20 percent of the country has electricity, and claiming: "It is a shame that an action taken for the protection of all Jamaicans in a time of crisis should be used as a political football". To date, post has received no reports of any arbitrary or politically-motivated detentions or arrests.

Restoration of Electrical Power Critical

10.(SBU) Speaking privately with the Ambassador the morning of August 23, Minister of National Security Dr. Peter Phillips confirmed that the primary reason for continuation of the State of Emergency was the power outage throughout much of the island. According to Phillips:

(A) power has been restored to only 20 percent of the country;

(B) he expected restoration to 40 percent by late August 23, and to 80 percent by August 25;

(C) at that point, PSM would lift the State of Emergency, as there were no other security factors which would necessitate its continuation.

Ambassador inquired as to whether elections still could be held as early as September 3; Phillips did not comment on this point.

A Well-oiled, Efficient JLP Campaign

11.(SBU) PSM recently acknowledged to the media that the JLP "have money. We do not". And indeed, the Opposition Party's slick and pervasive campaign advertising, carefully detailed and skillfully released manifesto (subject of septel), and efficient grass-roots canvassing have surpassed the PNP's efforts to date. Historically, the PNP has benefited from a powerful public relations machine, and often has surged in the final weeks of national campaigns. In this campaign, momentum has been with the JLP from the outset.

Analysis:

PSM's Delay in Setting New Date for Elections

12.(SBU) Post believes that PSM's hesitation in setting a new date for the election reflects her sense that the PNP is in trouble, and may well lose its majority in Parliament. As Jamaica cleans up after Hurricane Dean, the charismatic PSM must hope a successful recovery from the disaster will work to her political advantage in the home stretch. For at least a few more days, she is likely to portray herself as focusing exclusively on the recovery effort, relegating political considerations, and the date for elections, to the back burner. This strategy is risky, in that a poorly coordinated recovery effort might erode support for her Government. In coming days, much will be at stake.

JLP Draws Even with PNP in Popular Support

13.(SBU) The JLP had drawn within two points of the ruling PNP in popular support by mid-August, according to a Bill Johnson poll released by the Jamaica Gleaner on August 16, as Hurricane Dean approached. Based on data collected from 1,008 persons in 84 communities, Johnson's latest poll found support for the JLP had surged to 38 percent, up four points since mid-July, while support

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for the PNP had remained level at 40 percent. Given the survey's error margin of 3 percent, it suggests that, to that point, the race had tightened further. The JLP's apparent success in attracting more undecided voters is at least partially attributable to recent impressive performances by Opposition shadow minister of finance Audley Shaw and Opposition Leader Bruce Golding in nationally televised debates against Finance Minister Omar Davies on August 10 and PSM on August 11 (reftel A).

Fighting in Mandeville and Montego Bay; Allegations of Gunmen Infiltrating NE St. Catherine

14.(SBU) All political activity has been banned in the parish of Manchester after a stone-throwing fracas between dozens of JLP and PNP supporters in the town of Mandeville resulted in the stabbing death of a 23 year-old man on August 15. The candidates for the Manchester Central seat, multi-millionaire investor Peter Bunting (PNP) and the popular Sally Porteous (JLP), agreed to suspend public campaigning at the behest of Manchester Police Superintendent Martin Baylis.

15.(SBU) Following a fracas between JLP and PNP supporters in Montego Bay on August 20, St. James Police Superintendent Steve McGregor has threatened to impose a similar ban on campaigning in the volatile West Central St. James constituency. Meanwhile, in

north East St. Catherine, the police have been unable to find evidence of an infiltration of JLP gunmen (known as "shottas"), as alleged by PNP candidate Phyllis Mitchell; her JLP Opponent Gregory Mair has accused her of "character assassination".

16.(SBU) Comment: The ruckus in normally staid Mandeville, ignited by erection of a political billboard in the center of town, exemplifies the kind of incident which, in post's estimate, poses the greatest risk to the campaign: that spontaneous violence might escalate out of control. Whether the leadership of either major party effectively can control their volatile grass-roots supporters remains an open question; in the closely-contested constituencies, and, immediately after election results are announced, those which have changed hands, the question is acute. End Comment.

Legal Action Seeking Disqualification of Alleged U.S. Citizen Candidates or Members of Parliament?

17.(SBU) Responding to recent statements by PNP Spokesperson Donald Buchanan that the Party would take legal action to force the disqualification of three JLP candidates who allegedly had sworn, and subsequently failed to renounce, allegiance to the U.S. (reftel A), Director of Elections Danville Walker has reconfirmed publicly that all 146 candidates were properly nominated, and has warned the public "not to fall prey and be misled by election or political 'gimmickry' in this sensitive period leading up to the general election".

18.(SBU) For his part, the Chairman of the local observer group CAFFE (Citizens Action for Free and Fair Elections), a respected constitutional lawyer, has confirmed that any Member of Parliament (MP) would retain his/her seat unless/until a court of law had pronounced him/her disqualified. ((Comment: Thus far, six candidates (3 JLP, 3 PNP) have been alleged by the media to hold U.S. citizenship. Post has received numerous inquiries concerning renunciation from various candidates and officials of both parties; however, as far as post is aware, none actually have completed the renunciation process. As a practical matter, any legal challenges would take months (perhaps years) to work their way through the local court system. The August 23 "Observer" newspaper contains a cartoon depicting this issue as a "last straw" to which the PNP government is desperately clinging. End Comment.))

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